

GIVE THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFTS

by Senator Bev Hammerstrom

April 8, 2004

This month we welcome spring, a time of new beginnings. Flowers begin to sprout up; trees develop buds, birds lay eggs - it is a time to celebrate rebirth. That's why it is so appropriate that U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson has proclaimed April be observed as National Donate Life Month to help raise public awareness of the critical need for organ, tissue, marrow and blood donation.

Originally only one week was dedicated to this observation of organ donor awareness, but over the years many groups found this restrictive as that week often conflicted with other observances such as National Volunteer Week, or at times Passover or Holy Week. Changing to a month-long observance underscores Secretary Thompson's commitment to this issue. Many might remember that just 75 days after taking office, the Secretary launched his Gift of Life Donation Initiative.

Organ donation is, indeed, the gift of life. Donated organs offer a new chance at a normal life for thousands of individuals each year. But last year 121 people in Michigan died waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant, and over 2500 Michiganders are waiting for an organ transplant currently. The need for more organ and tissue donors is critical.

Did you know that one organ donor can save up to 7 lives with donation of heart, kidney, liver, lungs, pancreas and small bowel? Eye donation gives the gift of sight back to those who have lost the ability to see the beautiful world around them. Tissue donation from various tissues can give others the chance to walk again, to recover from severe burns or to stand. Tissue that can be donated includes: bone, blood, veins, skin, heart valves, ligaments, tendons, cartilage and bone marrow.

Most Michiganders are aware of the space on the back of their driver's license that can be utilized to make their wishes of donating organs known, but this alone is not enough. Many times driver's licenses are never located, or located too late. The best way to ensure that your wish to become a donor is carried out is to sign the Donor Registry. Passage of First Person Consent (HB 4479) in July of 2003, makes the donor's wishes the priority after death. Having a donor registry card on file ensures that one's decision to become a donor is fulfilled. It is important to let family members know of your wishes as well.

This April, as you watch the wonderful world of nature reawaken around you, consider giving the most important gift of all: life. It is awesome to realize that we have the power to donate this wonderful gift of life to another. Personally, I can think of no greater legacy to leave behind.

To learn more about organ and tissue donation and transplantation, you might want to order a free six-minute video entitled "Give So Others Can Live" by calling 1-800-482-4881. This number can also be utilized to sign up on the Gift of Life Organ, Tissue & Eye Donor Registry or you can do so online at

